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# The Tense-OP syntagm: unity to NC word order, evidence from Bulom, South Atlantic

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... by the criteria of regular sound correspondences among those languages [belonging to Niger-Congo] and of the reconstruction of proto-forms, Niger-Congo is not a proven genetic unity (Aikhenvald and Dixon 2001:8).<sup>1</sup>

## (1) Peaceful co-existence in Bulom (South Atlantic)

S AUX OP V  
S AUX O V (Kisi only)  
S V O

## (2) Course of the paper

Introduction of relevant Proto-Niger-Congo features  
Classification of South Atlantic  
The VP in Bulom and Atlantic, TNS-OP  
A contact explanation: S-AUX-O-V-X from Mande  
Other explanations, internal to Bullom, internal to Atlantic, and elsewhere  
Comparison to (speculations as to) reconstructed Niger-Congo

(3) Proto-Niger-Congo and early Niger-Congo had a syntagma SP AUX OP V OTHER, where SP stands for subject pronoun, AUX for “a string of morphemes (words, particles, auxiliaries, adverbs) representing mood, aspect, negation, and other categories, OP for object pronoun and v for ... the ‘inflectional stem’, consisting of a root and two bound suffixes: ROOT-EXTENSION-FINAL.VOWEL. All five components of the syntagm were discrete (Nurse 2008:62).

(4) TAM markers derive from auxiliary and modal verbs such as ‘want, go, come (from), be able, say, finish, be plus locative, do, live, sit’, and the subjunctive (Nurse 2007:245)

## (5) The tripartite classification of former (West) Atlantic

**North Atlantic** (“Atlantic” (Segerer 2012)); **Bijogo**, an isolate (North Atlantic? (Segerer 2012));

**South Atlantic**, former Southern Branch.

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## South Atlantic

### A. Mel languages

1. Temne (tem); Pukur (Baga Binari; bcg), Baga Manduri (bmd), Baga Tchitem (Sitemu, bsp), Lɔ ɲitɕ (Baga Fore, Mbulungish; mbv), Landoma (Kogoli; ldm)
2. Bulom languages: **Kisi** (Northern Kisi (kqs); Southern Kisi (kss); **Mani** (Bullom So, Mmani; buy), Sherbro (bun), **Bom** (bmf), and **Kim** (Krim, krm)
3. Gola (gol)

### B. Limba (East Limba (lma) and West-Central Limba (lia))

### C. Mansoanka (Sua, msw)

**Figure 1 South Atlantic classification (Voeltz 1996, Childs 2004, Lewis 2009)**

## (6) Environments to be considered

1. “Tense” distinctions, especially compound tenses (featuring auxiliaries)
2. embedded clauses, especially those following semi-auxiliaries

## (7) VO word order in the Perfective

- |                       |                       |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| a. à bɔ́mpá ñswé      | b. à tɪ́lá ùpɔ́lɔ́    |
| à bɔ́mpá ñ-sué        | à tɪ́lá ù-pɔ́lɔ́      |
| 1SG make.PFV NCM-soap | 1SG sell.PFV NCM-rice |
| ‘I prepared soap.’    | ‘I sold the rice.’    |

## (8) The Habitual in Mani

- |                               |   |
|-------------------------------|---|
| a. yá bɔ́mpà ñswé             | b. yá tɪ́là ùpɔ́lɔ́                       |
| yá bɔ́mpà ñ-sué               | yá tɪ́là ù-pɔ́lɔ́                         |
| 1SG make NCM-soap             | 1SG sell NCM-rice                         |
| ‘I make soap (for a living).’ | ‘I sell rice (regularly, at the market).’ |

## (9) VO word order in the Hortative ( Imperatives)

## (10) examples skipped

## (11) Split predicates with *ka*

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| a. ù ká cé ɲà wɔ́ɲɔ́ m̀mɔ́n                                  |  |
| ù ká cé ɲà wɔ́ɲɔ́ m̀-mɔ́n                                    |  |
| 3SG PAST IPF 3PL send NCM-water                              |  |
| ‘She sent them water.’                                       |  |
| b. ù ká cé mà wɔ́ɲɔ́ àwɔ́rɔ́k àcɔ́                           |  |
| ù ká cé mà wɔ́ɲɔ́ à-wɔ́rɔ́k à-cɔ́                            |  |
| 3SG PAST IPF PRO send NCM-worker NCM-DEF                     |  |
| ‘She sent it ( <i>ma</i> class) to the workers.’ (jd 2/4/06) |  |
| c. ù ká cè mì pàkà kɔ́pèr                                    |  |
| ù ká cè mì pàkà kɔ́pèr                                       |  |
| 3SG PAST IPF 1SG pay money                                   |  |
| ‘She paid me money.’   |  |

d. ù ká cè mì ñ pàká  
 ù ká cè mì ñ pàká  
 3SG PAST IPF 1SG PRO pay  
 ‘She paid me it (the money).’ (jd 2/4/06)

(8) w gbén s m nd s m  
 w gbén s m l s m  
 3SG finish food DEF eat  
 ‘She finished eating the food.’ (23 AbdJ BGb 10.1)

(12) hà yémá g b c k ñ.  
 hà yémá k b c k ñ  
 3PL want go chief DEF bury  
 ‘They will go bury him.’ (Joe Peku 22 May 08)

(13) ò ké yá tòdílálá ‘She gave me support.’  
 she give me support

(14) Possessive promotion: ‘He cut his finger.’

ò k tí ndú sùé vs. ò k tí sù ndòé  
 He cut him finger he cut finger his

(15) S-V sàà cìlùl ‘Saa is fat.’  
 Saa fat  
 ò sààlàò ‘She (always) catches (something thrown).’  
 she catch

S-V-O sàà kíndá diòó ‘Saa closed the door.’  
 Saa close door  
 k ùwó l wá sàá ‘The snake bit Saa.’  
 snake bite Saa

S-V-O-O sàà ké yá káníú ‘Saa gave me money.’  
 Saa give.PFV me money

(16) S-Aux-V sàà có c ‘Saa will see.’  
 Saa AUX see

S-Aux-O-V sàà wá diòó kìndàà ‘Saa was closing the door.’  
 Saa AUX door close

S-Aux-O-O-V sàà có ndú kóná dóó ‘Saa will deliver the message to him.’  
 Saa AUX him message pour

(17) Nominal objects in VPs with compound verbs S-Aux(-O)(-O)-V

- a. *fàlà có lɔ́ɔ́ndó yìkpàá* 'Fallah is sharpening the machete.'  
 fàlà có lɔ́ɔ́ndó yìkpàá  
 Fallah AUX machete sharpen
- ŋ wá bɔ́llón cɔ́ùwà* 'We were picking palm nuts.'  
 ŋ wá bɔ́llón cɔ́ùwà  
 1PL AUX palm.nuts pick
- b. *ò cò búngàṅ hìndaṅ cùṅyáṅ sùiyó* 'He's putting ointment on the swollen areas.'  
 ò cò búngàṅ hìndaṅ cùṅyáṅ sùiyó  
 3SG AUX area swollen oil apply
- à wá ndú kòówáṅ kíóó* 'They were giving him medicine.'  
 à wá ndú kòówáṅ kíóó  
 3PL AUX 3SG medicine give

(18) Clauses with semi-auxiliaries

- a. *sàa kéí bɔ́ɔ́lló m̀lìm̀lì*  
 Saa pass palm.nuts drop  
 'Saa passed by spilling palm nuts (on the road).'
- b. *ò cìí ỳmndé lòm̀̀ mú̀̀ṅ*  
 PRO finish wood burn all  
 'He completely finished burning the wood.'
- c. *í ló k̀sìé p̀̀̀kùd̀háá mí cáà*  
 I stay Kisi study until CONJ.1SG know  
 'I continued to study Kisi until I knew (how to speak it).'
- d. *ò dèmál sàá wàlló tòsàl kp̀̀ṅ*  
 he fail.BEN Saa work do.BEN completely  
 'He failed completely to do the work for Saa.'

(19) Three objects preceding an (extended) verb [pronoun first]

*ò kùṅ yá fàlá mààlón kèlló*  
 he go me Fallah rice give.BEN  
 'He's gone to offer rice to Fallah for me.'

(20) Other material within the split predicate

- a. *ò cò l̀̀ hàù kéǹ̀ṅ f̀̀ṅ màlàṅ wàná cè̀lén s̀̀là*  
 3SG PROG POL today give.MID first before person other get  
 'Let him give [it] to himself today first before another person gets [it].'

b. ò      cò      lánj      wɔ̃lɔ̃      hɔ̃ɔ̃ndɔ̃ɔ̃ŋ      ó      kɔ̃sú  
 3SG    PROG    3PL    again    place.MID    to    shoulder  
 ‘He will again place them on his shoulder.’

c. ò      cò      yá      pɔ̃ɔ̃      hùlùlló      ó      pàŋgá  
 3SG    PROG    1SG    now    wait.BEN    to    farm  
 ‘He is now waiting for me at the farm.’

d. ò      cò      nŋ      yá      mààlónj      hùngùlló  
 3SG    PROG    now/PERF    1SG    rice    beat.BEN  
 ‘He is beating rice for me.’

(21) The basic word order to be reconstructed for the Proto-Mande is S–AUX– O–V–X, it remains stable in the modern languages (Vydrine 2012).

(22) The case for a contact induced shift to S-Aux-O-V in Kisi

Kisi is completely surrounded and interpenetrated by speakers of Mande languages (in clockwise order from north around): Malinké/Maninka, Mania, Loma/Toma, Bandi, Mende, Kono, Lele, Kuranko (see [Kisi map](#) (Childs 2000))  
 power/status asymmetry (see Childs 2002))

- pacific traders, etc. of first phase of the Mande Expansion
- warlike second phase of Mande Expansion, militancy (the spread of Islam?)

the structure appears in no other Bulom languages

no other Bulom language is completely surrounded by Mande languages

(23) Questions contact explanation must answer

1. Why don't Mani, Kim, and Bom show such influence? Their speakers are all bilingual in Mande languages and their languages completely “succumbed” to Mande languages. They certainly show Mande influence elsewhere in the grammar (Childs 2004, Childs 2010).
2. Why wasn't the influence more pervasive in Kisi grammar, i.e., more OV structures? Why not all the way to completely OV?
3. Kisi shows appreciable lexical borrowing but no other structural influence. Why was the structural influence so limited? Targeted?

(24) Noon monosyllabic nouns move into preverbal slot (Soukka 2000:210-11)

	<b>S</b>	<b>AUX</b>	<b>V</b>	<b>O</b>
a.	<i>ɓeti-faa</i>	<i>hay</i>	<i>ki-tík</i>	<i>cunnoh</i>
	woman-DEF	will(AUX)	INF-cook	lunch(OBJ)
	‘The woman will prepare lunch.’			

	<b>S</b>	<b>AUX</b>	<b>O</b>	<b>V</b>
b.	<i>ya</i>	<i>mí</i>	<i>wa</i>	<i>ki-tík</i>
	she	can	C1SG	INF-cook
	‘She can prepare it.’			

S	AUX	O	V
c. <i>fu</i>	<i>joom-oo</i>	<i>bo'</i>	<i>ki-dúk</i>
2SG	should-PRES.NEG	people(OBJ)	INF-fool
'You shouldn't fool people.'			

(25) Monosyllabic complements may also split predicates (Soukka 2000:211)

ya	haan	dii	ki-hay
she	have.just(AUX)	here	INF-come
'She has just come here.'			

(26) *ɗí*            *jéem-ee-ra*            *ki-íis*            *ca*            *ki-ŋ am*  
 we.EXCL    try(AUX)-PAST-PUNCT    INF-leave(AUX)    OBJ(C1PL)    INF-eat  
 'We tried to stop eating them (e.g., peanuts).' (Soukka 2000:211)

### (15) Ewondo (A72a, Bantu, Bantoid, Benue-Congo)

(27) The Mbam languages (Mous 2005), a pool of synchronic variation

Mande (A46): in all tenses second subject marker after Tns, forms a phonological unit; OP within split predicate; infinitives have a nominal prefix and are preceded by OPs

Gumu (A62a): Basic SVO but OP precedes verb; NPs can precede verb if introduced by the 'infinitival' or locative prefix *go*

Nyokon (A45) mixed VO / OV

Nen (A44): objects generally precede the verb

(28) A scenario (Mous 2005: 423)

1) Mbam Bantu languages have option of O before infinitive (not clear how developed but found in other Bantu languages, irrespective of order of Modified and Modifier in NP)

2) O and Infinitive preceded by a locative particle, identical to an infinitive "prefix" bound to the verb stem

3) formal identity allows second (prefix) to be dropped: a structure Particle-O-V as complement of a(n) (auxiliary) verb

4) opens way for preverbal object position, esp. since already allowed is: (subject) Tns-X-V, where X = a repeated subject pronoun, an object pronoun, or an adverb

5) possible for X to be a full NP object

(29) Unifying split predicate structures in a single constituent: Tns-OP

remarkable stability

remarkable adaptability

(30) Established directionality for some features of the VP

1) general move from analysis toward synthesis

2) grammatical distinctions marked by tone, source likely lexical items (with tone) since phonologically eroded, e.g., tense marking on Mani subject pronouns (word order marking an aspectual distinction?)

3) semi-auxiliaries following the model of established auxiliaries

- 4) aspect distinctions basic or older, tense innovative, e.g., Past *ka* in Mani
- 5) renewal of aspectual distinctions by post-verbal particles, e.g., Kisi *nîŋ* ‘now / Perfect’

(31) Future directions

Extend in-depth scrutiny to other languages in South Atlantic  
Examine validity of TNS-OP as a reconstructible constituent of Niger-Congo  
Assess pervasiveness of embedded OV structures  
Establish grammaticalization chains



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